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AN EXPEDITION TO TRIPOLI.

BY THE

VICOMTE DE MATHUISIEULX.

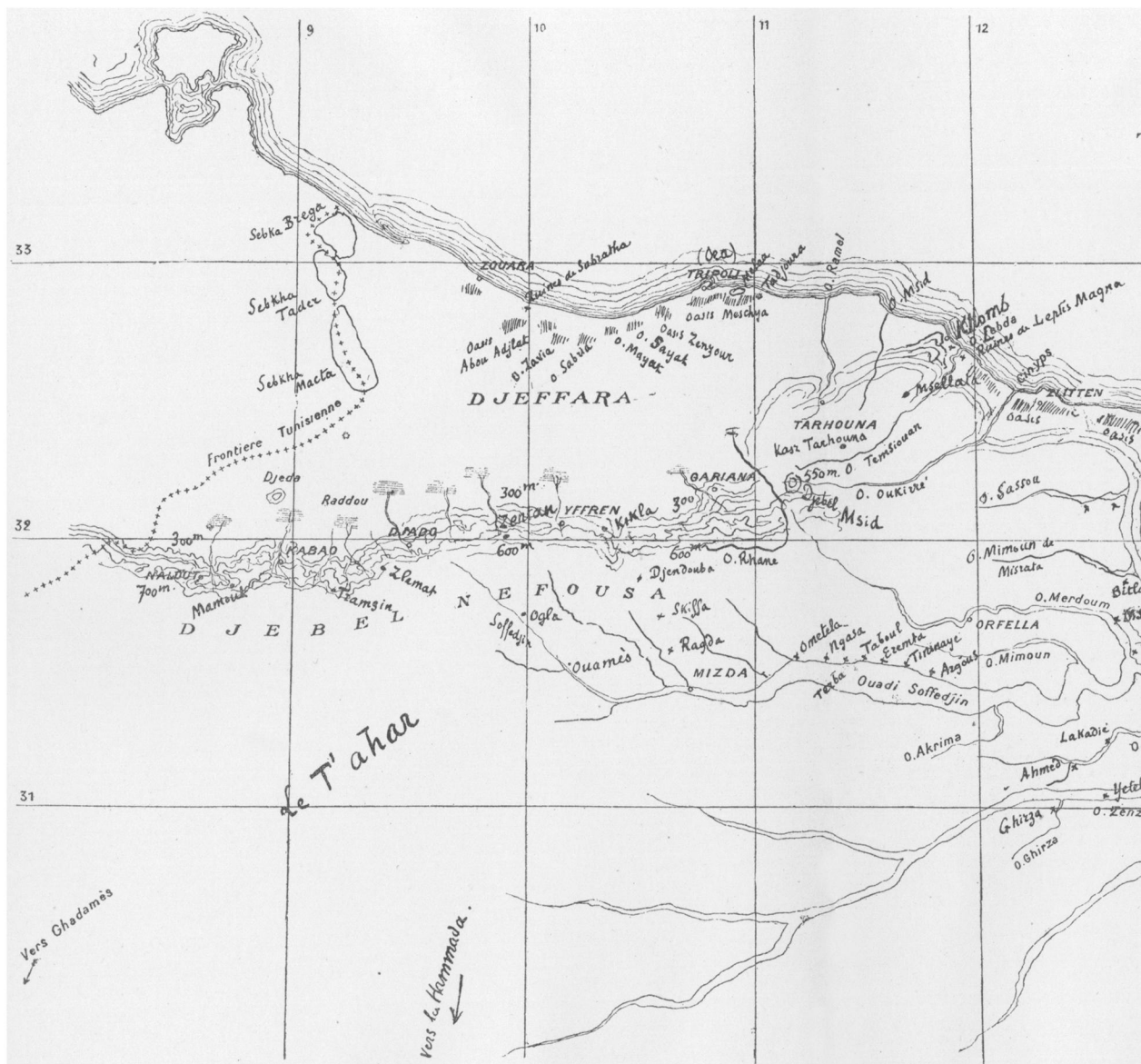
For thirty years past scientific and military expeditions have been multiplied in northern Africa, and investigations of all kinds have gone beyond the territories inhabited by the Arabs and the Berbers into the Sahara. In this way Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and even Morocco, have revealed their important secrets of ancient and modern geography; but the Turkish colony of Tripoli has remained unexplored because the Sublime Porte absolutely forbids its entrance to strangers.

This regrettable void moved me, three years ago, to overcome all the obstacles in the way of furnishing to science the first collection of data on this hidden region. Thanks to a happy concurrence of circumstances, I succeeded in making a methodical exploration of all Tripoli, properly so called, between the Tunisian frontier and the gulf of the Great Syrtis and the administrative boundaries of Fezzan.

I made my third journey last April. With a small party, a few soldiers for escort and a caravan of camels, I left the port of Tripoli to follow the shore to the eastward of that city as far as Khoms.

I already knew this Tripolitan shore, which I had travelled from Tunisia to the Great Syrtis. Its low dunes continue almost without a break, and extend under the sea with a slope so gradual that ships must keep far offshore in order to avoid the submarine shoals. There is no shelter for shipping except the road of Tripoli, and this road itself is so bad that even a slight storm makes entrance impossible. It is not unusual for the weekly steamers from France and Italy to pass the roadstead without disembarking passengers or merchandise. Quite lately the English Consul-General, returning from a leave of absence, found himself obliged to put to sea again for fifteen days, though he had come so near as to see the terrace of his residence.

The only two ports on this coast are Tripoli and Khoms, and the latter is frequented only by small English steamers, which load with *halfa* for the London paper mills. The new anchorage of Misrata,



REPRODUCTION OF THE AUTHOR'S MAP.

THE LONGITUDES ARE FROM THE MERIDIAN OF PARIS, $2^{\circ} 20' 15''$ EAST OF GREENWICH.

MISSION DE MATHUISIEUX

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at the eastern extremity of the *vilayet*, is only a stopping-place for the Italian Maritime Company, for the service of the town, situated two and a half miles from the sea. The seashore of Tripoli may be called a solitude. Formerly it was not so; we learn from Homer that the companions of Ulysses were hospitably received there by the celebrated lotos-eaters. Strabo relates that it was a resort for fishermen, who caught the fish on the fly or by running along the low beach as the tide went out. But other proofs of the ancient prosperity of these shores exist in great number in the remains of Punic and Roman cities. The three principal towns which gave the name of Tripolis to all this part of Africa were: Oea, on the site of the modern Tripoli; Sabratha, fifty miles to the west; and Leptis Magna, fifty miles to the east. A number of secondary ports were intermediate among these three emporia. It is probable that these ports were established by the Phœnicians of Sidon, for it was they who first visited this coast to trade with the tribes of the Fezzan; but we shall not be able to speak with certainty on this point until the Turkish Government withdraws its prohibition against excavations. At present we can only distinguish the superstructures, which all belong to the epoch of imperial Rome. Nevertheless, it may be affirmed that the Tripolitan emporia were of considerable importance. The remains of Oea are not to be seen, because the City of Tripoli covers them with its houses; but at Sabratha and Leptis there rise superb temples, stadia, and enormous amphitheatres, the whole surrounded with vast enclosures. At Gargareeh, near Tripoli, a tomb recently uncovered has made it clear to scholars that women were admitted into the sect of Mithra—a fact previously unknown. At many other points we find the towers used by the ancients as telegraphic stations, from which they transmitted news in a single night from Egypt to Morocco.

A line of dunes between fifteen and thirty feet in height follows the Tripolitan seashore almost continuously. Where these dunes are interrupted the sea invades the plain, or *Djeffara*, which is lower than the sea-level. In this way there are formed *Sebkhas*, or natural salt marshes, like those of Brega, of Tader, and Macta, at the western extremity, and that of Melaa, east of Tripoli.

Two or three miles behind this line of dunes runs a succession of maritime oases, frequently interrupted. These oases are rich in palm trees, but their very narrow breadth forms hardly a thousandth part of the desert, sandy plain which extends between the sea and the high interior plateau, over a mean breadth of sixty miles. The oasis of Zouara, formerly celebrated for the excel-

lence of its water and the perfidy of its inhabitants, who were dreaded by the Venetian mariners, is now no more than a grove, which shelters the Turkish garrison at the Tunisian frontier. Abou-Adjlat is the largest of these garden spots west of Tripoli. Then come Sabua, Zavia, Djedjaim, Mayat, Sayat, and Zenzour, reduced now to the mere local supply, but in ancient times frequented by the rich Romans, who there built sumptuous villas. The name of Meschya is given to the immense palm forest which surrounds Tripoli "like a collar of emeralds," and reaches as far as Tadjoura. From Tadjoura to Khoms the gardens disappear, to begin again in the neighbourhood of Lebda (Leptis Magna), and continue without interruption as far as Cape Zoroug, under the names of Zlitten and Misrata. The Arabs of Zlitten enjoy such a bad reputation that their co-religionists hardly dare to cross their territory; and, unlike all the other centres of the *vilayet*, no Jews are to be found in this—it is said, because the Zlittians have killed them all. On the other hand, the natives of Misrata are affable and friendly toward other tribes, and no one can explain the reason of this difference of character between men of the same race and civilization.

At a single point of the coast the hills rise above the sea; this is in the environs of Khoms, where the little plateau of Tarhouna throws out a spur, channelled by the ancient waters.

Geographers have erred in tracing water-courses in the plain, or *Djeffara*, and flowing into the sea. In the western part no one of the streams of the interior plateau goes beyond the foot of the great cliff, where they spread out on the sand and create a zone for the culture of grain. It is only in the eastern part of the country, where the plain is narrowed by the terrace of Tarhouna, that some *wadys* contribute in an intermittent way their thread of water to the Mediterranean; such are the Ramel, the Msid, the Lebda, the Cinyps.

In my two previous journeys I had explored all the *Djeffara* and the interior plateau. I had yet to study the terrace of Tarhouna, and find in what way it was connected with the high central land. From Khoms I took the route towards Gariana *via* Msellata. The Tarhounian plateau, which is intermediate between the coast and the Djebel, 2,000 feet high, measures, on the average, only 1,000 feet. It descends from the southwest to the northeast in such a way that where it joins the Djebel it is more than 1,300 feet high, while the last hills on the sea measure hardly three hundred. From this conformation it results that the *wadys* Temsiouan and

Oukirre, which we identified with the mouths of the Lebda and the Cinyps, are perfectly dry and without banks, like ribbons of verdure; while the wady Ramel and the Msid, cutting an abnormal ravine for themselves, have ploughed the soil very deep.

The Tarhouna is continued by calcareous rocks, like all the other Tripolitan elevated land; but there is a very great number of basaltic columns, which pierce the generally level surface with bristling cones. In the vertical sections of the wadys are frequently found basaltic pillars, their black line marking itself on the white surfaces like so many sheaves, spreading widely open at the upper part. I remarked that the projecting rocks assumed the pointed form wherever they were due to the basaltic flow, while their summits were harmoniously rounded when they resulted from erosion.

The Tarhouna was densely peopled in antiquity. The innumerable vestiges of Roman settlements show that the ancients cultivated the olive to a great extent. We found everywhere the remains of curious oil presses, which Barth believed to be altars for human sacrifice. Every settlement possessed several of these *torculars*, which, strangely enough, are the only monuments left standing among the ruins of dwellings, though their elevated shape should seem to have marked them for destruction.

To-day the Tarhouna is almost a desert. Apart from the grain fields of Msellata, of the Kasr Tarhouna, and a few other localities, we meet no sign of life but a few wandering Arabs. For a few years past these shepherds have taken up a new industry; they gather the natural yield of the halfa and take it to the seashore, where it is exported for the paper factory. They overload their camels with twice the ordinary burden of three hundred pounds.

How does it happen that the olive trees, once so abundant, as attested by the remains of the presses, have all disappeared? I think this must be laid to the charge of the Arab invasion, which destroyed or neglected the trees, the Arabs devoting themselves only to the raising of sheep.

In the very centre of the plateau of Tarhouna I had the good fortune to discover a Neo-Punic inscription, the only one which possesses a precise date, and consequently an historical document of great value.

The highest point of the plateau is the Msid, which rises to 1,800 feet. From the summit we embrace all the region bounded by the Djebels, Djemma, Magra, Chaïet, and Hammas on the east; while on the west opens, like a great cleft, the valley of wady Rhane,

marking the separation from the great central plateau. Beyond the wady Rhane, in fact, we come to the high lands or T'ahar. Up to the present time these high lands were regarded as mountains, but they really form a plateau, with a mean altitude of 2,000 feet in the northern part, and sinking gradually towards the stony Sahara, or Hammada. The mistake was natural; the plateau ends abruptly on the north, where it plunges down on the Djeffara by a cliff, which runs through the whole width of the vilayet parallel to the sea. The Djeffara plain, which rises from the sea perceptibly towards the south, has an elevation of 1,000 feet at the point where it joins the foot of the great cliff. The immense front or northern trench of the plateau (a vertical wall of 1,000 feet) is remarkable for the horizontal lines which stripe it like the lines on a sheet of music paper. These lines are the vertical section of the alternate superimposed strata of gypsum and limestone.

This rampart has not remained solid in every part. It has been broken down at various points by the waters after they have cut into the edge of the plateau along a zone of eight or nine miles. This zone forms a picturesque tangle of deep ravines and gorges, of pillars and needles, and overhanging masses of rock.

It is not in any way surprising that my predecessors of long ago, hastening their march towards Lake Chad or the Niger, imagined they beheld a chain of mountains in the rugged edges of the plateau, which seems to one approaching from the Djeffara like a range of the Himalaya. The natives themselves speak of Djebel Gariana, between the wady Rhane and the great gap of Kikla; Djebel Yffren and Djebel Nefousa, west of that depression.

The population here is no longer Arab; it is composed of Berbers of the purest type. In the Gariana and in certain districts of the Nefousa, as at Nalout, these mountaineers live like troglodytes, in subterranean abodes identical with those described by Herodotus. On the front of the *massif* the excavations are cut in the vertical walls of the gorges; on the plateau they are opened at the bottoms of great square wells, dug in the horizontal surface. In these latter, which are so many deep precipices open to the sky, the approach is by a narrow, winding passage, of which the upper entrance is concealed by plants and shrubs at a little distance from the edge of the well. The path is not wide enough for two men abreast, and the slope is so steep that one descends faster than he wishes. Notwithstanding the narrowness of the path, the animals, including even the camels, find their way to the underground stables.

In some localities these cave-houses are the only habitations to

be met with, and it is easy to understand that in a land swept by continual high winds, with torrid heat by day and very cold nights, the natives prefer a shelter with an even temperature and proof against the violence of the wind.

At Zentan the troglodyte population is largely Jewish. These people claim descent from Israelites who emigrated to this spot immediately after the return from the Babylonian Captivity; but there is no historical evidence for the assertion, and it is a fact that for centuries the Zentan Jews have held no communication with those of Tripoli.

The Berbers of the Djebels, easily distinguished from the Arabs by their square heads and their more powerful forms, are still more unlike the Arabs in character and manners.

The Arab wave beat in vain against the boundary of the plateau, which has been truly defined by a geographer as the real continental shore of this part of Africa. The Berbers successfully repelled the conquerors, and it was only after sanguinary wars that the Turks overcame these mountaineers armed with flint muskets.

The Berbers have never admitted a marriage with the Arabs. Frank and brave, they preserve their love of independence and the hope of one day regaining it from the Turks; and the Porte, well aware of this disposition, keeps a strict watch upon them. When they gather about their fires in the night they recount the exploits of their ancestors and sing patriotic songs. Their dwellings are so many eagles' nests in the gorges and on the isolated peaks. At Nalout, at Mamout, at Kabao, the villages are perched on the sides of rocks overhanging deep clefts. These rocks terminate in fantastic battlements cut in the mountain without any masonwork. The interior passages of these aerial citadels are so narrow and deep that the rays of the sun never reach the bottom. The walls look like pigeon-houses, pierced as they are at regular intervals with holes, the openings of the store-rooms in which each family keeps its provisions, as in a time of invasion.

These Nefousan Berbers are Mussulmans of a special sect, closely affiliated to those of the M'zab of Algeria, the head of which resides, it is said, in Arabia, in Oman. It seems certain that the Nefousans formerly belonged to the Christian communion, to judge from the numerous traces of Byzantine convents and the details of some of their legends.

Industrious and hard-working, the Berbers cultivate the northern border of the plateau, the only inhabited and habitable part of this region. The smallest bit of ground in the ravines is turned

to account for the production of barley, by an ingenious system of sustaining walls. Behind all these ravines, where the valleys melt into the broad surface, the olive plantations are in full vigour, as at Djado, at Zentan, and at Yffren. The irrigating methods here employed might be taken for those of our own engineers. Djado has been and still is the great religious and intellectual centre of the Nefousa.

Yffren (called the Castle of the Mountain) was the military centre, but the Berber stronghold was destroyed by the Turks when they succeeded in putting down the last revolt of the celebrated Rouma in 1850.

In general, the chief towns of districts—Gariana, Kikla, Yffren, Djado, Zentan, Nalout—are built on the great gaps through which the caravans pass to climb the plateau. The mountaineers held these places to defend the approaches to their homes; the Turks have fortified them, in their turn, to keep control of their unruly subjects.

From Gariana I made my way to Mizda, on the wady Soffedjin, in order to follow up to its source this great transverse gorge of Tripoli, which, in a previous journey, I had descended to the sea; so that I have traversed the whole interior plateau known as T'ahar.

This plateau, as I have said, slopes gently towards the south, and merges without any transition into the Hammada, which is at the same elevation as the point where the Djeffara joins the great northern cliff. The northern slope is consequently very rapid, since it consists only of the narrow, indented zone already mentioned. It was on the crest of this zone that the Romans constructed the series of stations along the plateau, their *Limes Tripolitanus*. The ruins of Tramzin, of Slammat, of Zentan, of Yffren, and Djendouba are the vestiges of the *Limes* which I have been able to identify. These stations served at the same time as quarters for the garrisons and as a protection to the colonists, and they extended from Talapé (Gabes) to Leptis Magna (Lebda).

Besides its descent towards the south, the plateau inclines to the east, and the *wadys* follow this direction and terminate in the Great Syrtis. The principal wady is the Soffedjin, which crosses solitudes visited only by a few wandering Arabs, the Berbers not being met with again till Rhadames is reached.

The name of the Soffedjin seems to be derived from the snakes which abound in it (*Soff ed Djinn*, Valley of Devils).

Above Mizda there are but few traces of Roman occupation, only here and there a post on the line of routes to the interior, as

at Djendouba, Skiffa, Ragda, Ouamès, and Ogla. At present all this region is infested by the Touareg, who have been driven out from the French Sahara; and it is a wonder that we passed through their encampments without harm.

Mizda, which appears, from its prominence on the maps, to be a great centre, is, in fact, a miserable hamlet, in which a few fanatical Senoussi make a bare subsistence from their two hundred palm-trees. The two tribes inhabiting this hermitage were formerly engaged in constant wars with each other, and the two parts of the town bristle with rude forts, in which the combatants took shelter when defeated. Peace has prevailed since the Turks established a permanent garrison.

Beyond Mizda the Soffedjin and its affluents, and the other tributaries of the Great Syrtis (all of them dry beds, except when a storm pours down for a few hours), are bordered with remains of forts and fortified farms and tombs, in very great numbers. The colonization was so thorough up to the lagoon of Taourgha (now entirely dry) that the establishments almost touched each other.

It is in this region that the encampments are most numerous, and here the Arabs cultivate their fields of barley along narrow strips of land over a surface sometimes six or eight miles in breadth. Tangible evidences of the ancient density exist at Ometela, Ngassa, Terba, Teboul, Eremta, Tinanaye, Argous, and Otfella, on the Soffedjin; at Ghirza and Yetelaoui, on the Zemzem; at Ahmed and Lakadié, on the Nefd; at Feskia and Msellat, on the Merdoun; at Bitlasan, on the Mimoum; and at other ruins on the Sassou.

In our day, therefore, as in antiquity, it is in the eastern part of Tripoli, between the Great Syrtis and the line from Gariana to Mizda, that man has tried to live on the products of the soil, by cultivating the beds of the wadys, numerous enough and broad enough to make altogether a considerable surface.

Besides these gardens in corridors there have never been more than two other zones of cultivation: the narrow line of maritime oases, with their palm trees, and the northern border of the interior plateau, with its olives. But no comparison can be made between the Roman colonization and the meagre Arab encampments which have taken its place.

The country has been ruined from top to bottom. This is probably the result of several causes simultaneously at work, as in other regions of northern Africa. I do not believe that the meteorological conditions have changed since the time of the Romans.

The Latin texts and the monuments seem, on the contrary, to

establish the fact that, so far as the atmosphere and the soil are concerned, everything remains as it was in antiquity. The present condition is due to the idleness of the Arabs and their destruction of the growths. They have allowed the innumerable wells to become choked and the vegetation to perish. In a country so little favoured by nature the first requisite is a diligent and hard-working population. The Romans took several centuries to make the land productive by damming the ravines and sinking wells in the *wady* beds. Except in some terribly stony deserts, the soil is excellent, and very fertile when supplied with water, but it receives none now that the wells are abandoned.

To recapitulate, the structure of Tripoli is simple: a stretch of seashore, then a great interior plateau, ending abruptly on the Djeffara and declining gradually to the south and the east. From the plateau a terrace, called Tarhouna, projects towards the sea. The distribution of the population is equally simple: the low lands are held by the Arabs, sedentary in the oases near the sea and nomadic everywhere else; and the indented zone of the plateau, called Djebel Gariana and Djebel Nefousa, is inhabited by Berbers of unmixed race.

Very different ideas with regard to the geography of this country existed before our expedition, and to have set the facts in a true light is sufficient reward for our efforts.

GAURISANKAR IS NOT MOUNT EVEREST.

In the fall of 1903 Captain H. Wood, R.E., of the Indian Survey, was sent to Nepal by Lord Curzon to ascertain whether the peak known to the Nepalese as Gaurisankar was identical or not with the peak known to us as Mount Everest. An experienced surveyor, and equipped with the best instruments and with full permission to use them, the results he obtained are of no small interest, for they end a controversy extending over nearly a half century concerning the name of the highest mountain in the world. These results of Captain Wood's visit are given in his "Report on the Identification and Nomenclature of Himalayan Peaks," recently published in Calcutta. An article based on this report is printed in *Nature* (No. 1828), from which the following facts are taken.

The chief result of Wood's visit to Kaulia, Nepal, was that he